

REMARKS

Claims 1-21 are pending after entry of the paper. Claims 1-21 have been subject to a restriction requirement.

Claims 1-21 have been amended. Support may be found throughout the instant specification and the claims as originally filed. No new matter has been introduced by these amendments. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the restriction requirement in view of the above claim amendments and below remarks are respectfully requested.

Examiner's Restriction Requirement and Provisional Election

The Examiner has required restriction of claims 1-21 under 35 U.S.C. §§121 and 372. The Examiner has outlined two groups which allegedly are not so linked as to form a single general inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1. Specifically, the Examiner has outlined the following groups:

- Group I (claims 1-13) drawn to a process for the production of sulphuric acid.
- Group II (claims 14-21) drawn to a plant comprising at least two contact stages and at least one absorber.

Applicants provisionally elect to prosecute Group I encompassing claims 1-13.

Applicants make this election with traverse.

Traversal of Restriction Requirement

The Examiner contends that the Groups I and II do not relate to a single general inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1 because they allegedly lack the same or corresponding

special technical features under PCT Rule 13.2. Specifically, the Examiner contends that lack of unity is evidenced “a priori” because the claims allegedly lack subject matter in common, or allegedly lack a common feature. Applicants respectfully disagree.

Claims 1 and 14 do have at least one feature in common, namely the recirculation of the partial stream of the gas to the first (pre-)contact stage. Claim 1 recites, in relevant part, “withdrawing a partial stream of the sulphur dioxide and sulphur trioxide-containing gas from a contact stage located upstream of the last main contact stage . . . and returning said mixed partial stream to the first contact stage.” Claim 14 recites, in relevant part, “a pre-contact, located upstream of the main contact stage, comprising at least one pre-contact stage, wherein the exit of one contact stage located upstream of the last contact stage of the main contact, is connected with the inlet of the first pre-contact stage via a re-circulation line.” Applicants respectfully submit that at least these elements of claims 1 and 14 are common features and/or common subject-matter, and therefore assert that there is unity of invention among Groups I and II.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing amendments and remarks, applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the restriction requirement and examination of Groups I and II simultaneously.

AUTHORIZATION

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required for consideration of this Amendment to Deposit Account No. **13-4500**, Order No. 4791-4000.

In the event that an extension of time is required, or which may be required in addition to that requested in a petition for an extension of time, the Commissioner is requested to grant a petition for that extension of time which is required to make this response timely and is hereby authorized to charge any fee for such an extension of time or credit any overpayment for an extension of time to Deposit Account No. **13-4500**, Order No. 4791-4000.

Respectfully submitted,
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